3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OI17 Murngin OI17

*532 [178] The aborigines told me that, prior to the visit of Mr and Mrs Berndt to Yirrkalla during 1947, they had not carved these small heads. But when they made one and showed it to Mr and Mrs Berndt, the interest shown stimulated them to make more.[23] These little examples of aboriginal craftsmanship, many showing evidence of considerable skill, prove the ability of the aboriginal craftsmen to adapt themselves to changing conditions.

*532 881 114 *Function.* Elkin and the Berndts[24] state that the carved figures they illustrate of 'the Elder Wauwelak Sister, the Great Laintjung, and Laintjung's son Banaitja' are shown only to initiated men. They write: 'The original artist who has made the figure enters the hut; outside, the postulants are sitting or standing with faces turned away, but when the songman begins to clap his sticks, they are led up to look upon the sacred object. Finally, when the singing is completed, the design on the figure are explained and discussed. At times, during the showing of the object, the figure may be held ritually by an actor who writhes on the ground like the python who swallowed the Wauwelak sisters.'

During my last visit to Yirrkalla (1952) I questioned the aborigines about these statements. The men of both moieties were emphatic that they were incorrect and that the carved figures they had produced for Mr Berndt and me are purely secular and would not be used in any of the secret rituals.[25]

They explained, however, that pole figures (similar to the Chaseling figure) representing *Djunkgao* and his sister *Madalait* are kept in special huts near the ceremonial grounds where the *Djunkgao* ceremonies are being performed. The figure of *Djunkgao* is shown to all the initiated men, but that of *Madalait* to only a few of the older tribal leaders.

* 532 778 The pole figures of *Djunkgao* and *Madalait* are carved in hard wood, painted with the appropriate designs and decorated with *dua* ceremonial string. At the completion of the rituals the string is removed for future use and the posts, with other sacred objects, buried in the mud of a sacred waterhole.[26] The following year the same figures are taken out, re-painted and re-decorated. They usually last about three years.

*532 The carved figures in my collection, *Tjambuwal*, *Laitjun*, or even the carved figures of *Djunkgao* and *Madalait*, would not have been used in any sacred ceremonies. They were produced because the native men enjoyed making them and because we were interested.

*532 177 322 *Methods of Manufacture.* During the last year there was a large Air Force camp near Yirrkalla where, at one time or another, most of the able-bodied aborigines were employed. During that time the aborigines not only learned the

23. Elkin and the Berndts (1950), Pl. 9, illustrate a number of the carved heads collected by Mr and Mrs Berndt.

24. Elkin and the Berndts (1950), p. 50.

25. Elkin and the Berndts (1950), p. 58, state that the carved heads 'are shown to novices at initiation, and to postulants at ceremonies of revelation'.

26. Warner (1937), p. 356, describes how the sacred objects of the *dua moiety* ceremonies (analogous to those of *Djunkgao* at Yirrkalla) are buried in the mud of the sacred totemic waterhole.

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
OI17 Murngin OI17

either for good or ill. Thus there are found few natural leaders among these people, a man's individuality being submerged in the life of his horde or tribe. This same fact, coupled with the extreme isolation in which this race has for centuries lived, has also served to stultify progress.

Only by a man of exceptionally forceful character could reforms be instituted, and life has consequently gone on practically unchanged for countless generations.

Toward those whose friendship has been proved these aborigines show a splendid spirit of loyalty. Those who treat them in a fair and friendly fashion will receive fair dealing and devoted friendship in return.

Arts and Crafts

The weapons and utensils used throughout this area correspond to the usual aboriginal type, but include a number of local variations. Little use is made of any weapon other than the spear, though clubs of several types are used to a limited extent, as also are boomerangs.

There are many varieties of wooden spears, barbed and unbarbed, some of which have the head and the haft fashioned out of a single piece of hardwood in a very remarkable way. Flaked stone spear-heads are much used, particularly for fighting, and these heads are traded over wide distances.

The use of iron, particularly for spear-heads and cutting implements, has been known for many decades, this material being obtained in limited quantities from the old traders from Macassar. Only boomerangs of a heavy type are used, and these are by no means common. The light, return boomerang is unknown, as is also the shield.

Many types of "dilly-bag" are made, some of which are of such fine texture as to retain water. Others are highly decorated with feathers or fur woven in during manufacture. The material used in most cases is the split leaf of the pandanus palm. Other bags are made of string knotted very neatly and evenly in an open mesh. Fish nets are also constructed in the same way.

Excellent string is manufactured from bark fibre, grass, fur, and human hair, and is used for a wide variety of purposes. Much of it designed for ceremonial purposes is decorated with feathers interwoven during spinning. Strong rope is made of bark fibre or grass, and used in the harpooning of turtle, dugong, or porpoise, and for the mooring of canoes.

6; Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951
OI17 Murngin OI17

Can it continue to exist in its present form, in a situation of culture contact? Example has shown that under abnormal circumstances, when the inroads of an alien culture have attacked the social structure of the indigenous society, its survival odds are relatively low. Collapse of Aboriginal community life brings disillusionment, loss of faith in accepted doctrines, and consequent maladjustment. That is to say, as contact becomes more intensive, a cult of the Kunapipi variety will become correspondingly corrupted, and its principal intent will be overshadowed by the distortion of certain aspects which will inevitably serve to destroy it completely.

On the other hand, a cult of this type, which so adequately fulfils an aboriginal's religious requirements within his own cultural environment, is so much a part of his material and psychological make-up, and expresses the basic urges and necessities of his life, should surely find some place in his changing society, among widening interests. This should ideally be the case if the aboriginal is to retain something of his individuality, and not become merely a stereotyped imitation of the European. But this ideal form of adaptation is not to be found in North Australia to-day, and there are no indications that it will be so in the future. Although the indigenous religious faiths still retain their full significance in some areas, in others they are gradually changing, and their hold on the people's life is weakening. In some regions they are merely a shadow of their former selves, distorted to meet the selfish aims of a few maladjusted and frustrated tribal remnants.

Still, however, in outlying camps where aboriginal life proceeds comparatively undisturbed (and there are few such areas to-day) the twirling bullroarer is heard, and the answering call of the women; there is rhythmic singing, and the stamping of dancing feet on the sacred ground echoes through the quietness of the Bush. People have come together to renew their faith, to refresh themselves spiritually, and to ensure that the continuity of the seasons is maintained, as well as the continuance of the life they know and appreciate. The pervading influence of the Great Mother is, to them, a reality.

7: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1952
OI17 Murngin OI17

important form of expressing these is the totemic dancing in conjunction with the sacred *rangga*. All these are correlated with the basic theme. The main structure of the ritual refers symbolically to the sexual sequence which culminates in the act of childbirth; and this, in a variety of forms, is the focal point. It is completely orthodox, for in it is contained the core, the basic thesis, of the Djanggawul myth. By re-enacting the primal birth of their ancestors, the Arnhem Landers convey the sense of 'tribal' (clan or linguistic group) continuity: a continuity, moreover, which cannot be broken unless the actual performance of the *nara* rituals is interrupted or halted. That such an event as abandonment of the *nara* could occur, *cannot* enter the minds of initiates, any more than we could fully envisage the total collapse of our society and culture. On the fringe of alien contact, of course, in towns or on mission stations, this possibility may vaguely enter the minds of some; but even these, though they may have taken part in only one *nara*, cannot consider their utter abandonment. If the *nara* are performed more irregularly to-day than two decades ago, the intention is always present in the Aborigines' minds that, if possible, they will be performed more frequently in the future. The Ancestral Beings will continue to live, so say old informants, even if the life that people know to-day should disappear altogether. The Gods are not dependent on man for their survival, and the 'eternal Dreaming stream' cannot be stemmed.

Upon this thesis rests the social aspect of the Djanggawul, for re-enactment of the initial birth of the people expresses their inherent fertility, which by the grace of the Djanggawul can be diffused to embrace a concept of universal fertility. Moreover, it expresses the seasonal rhythm. The coming of the wet season, with its rains, germinates the soil; foliage and vegetable matter, and all the natural species, 'are re-born'. Because of the Djanggawul, the natural resources of the land are ensured. Man, as a social being, may continue the life he knows, in the way dictated traditionally by the Gods. He is assured of survival.

7: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1952
OI17 Murngin OI17

this does not apply to the Baijini, who are said also to have been present on the Djanggawul's arrival. 773

The Baijini, although partially mythological are, rather, historical; for they are said to have been the pre-Macassans, primarily traders and aliens to the coast, and not in any way creative as were the Djanggawul. They are, however, treated in the myth as if contemporary with these Ancestral Beings. This inconsistency, which does not conform to other data relating to the Baijini, seems to be a projection of the historical into the mythological past, and for this the necessity for oral transmission, with its reliance on individual narrators, must be held partly responsible. Although an interesting feature, and one which illustrates the flexibility of traditional mythology handed on in this way, contrary material shows that it must be regarded as an introduced element. This being so, one may wonder how many other elements, not apparent to the anthropologist, have been incorporated through the centuries. Alien words or concepts, of course, may be found in many traditional songs and stories, and are not especially apparent in the great Djanggawul cycle. The inclusion of the Baijini, and for that matter of Laintjung, is quite logical from the Aboriginal point of view. It widens the sacred perspective of the *dua*, bringing it, so to speak, up to date; for their religion is a living faith, the scope of which must be broad enough to include all facets of the contemporary situation. Moreover, it serves to explain why the *dua* may use black charcoal when painting their sacred clan designs, and why the *jiritja* may use certain *dua* possessions, such as red feathered string from the *lindaridj* parakeet. In this way it correlates *dua* and *jiritja* belief; and it gives sacred sanction to the *dua* for their use of black colouring, an important consideration from a ritual point of view. 773 178 182

There is another inconsistency, too. We are told that the Djanggawul are creative, and thus 'super-human': they are, virtually, Goddesses and a God; and yet they behave in very much the same way that human beings do to-day. They are, that is, made in the image of man; but they are not answerable to man. When they behave in a super-human way—in their creative feats, in the miraculous reappearance of the younger Sister after being killed by sorcery, in their possession of elongated clitorises and penis—they are projections of human wishes and ideals, possessed of qualities which these Aborigines find particularly attractive or important. Such projection, however, may take place only at a subconscious level; the repressed desire for incestuous relations, for example, severely prohibited in everyday life, finds an outlet in mythology. The Djanggawul Sisters represent an ideal of Arnhem Land womanhood —ever bountiful, ever fertile: for this aspect is paramount in the 773 776 182

8:Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

western Arnhem Land, too, coming up from the south and the south-east almost to the coast near Goulburn Islands.

The north-eastern people, like their western neighbours, pay great attention to the outward expression of their religious ideas, to provide a guide to ritual behaviour and to impress certain concepts on the minds of postulants. Their sacred objects do not consist only of those introduced by Djanggawul, Laindjung and other Beings. In the *nara* and other rituals many beautifully made *rangga* are used, some associated with natural species or with totemic features, others with human organs and ancestral people. Usually conventionalised, they are made from hard or soft woods, cane or paperbark, sometimes bound with jungle-tree twine, and decorated with clan totemic designs and colourful feathered strings. Human figures carved from blocks of wood are painted and ornamented in a similar way. Many other sacred objects are used in the Wauwalak ceremonies – the *ubar* drum of the *ngurlmag*, for example, the tall grass-bound *Jelmalandji* posts of the *kumapipi*, and the long *julunggul* "trumpets" and dancing posts of the *djunggawon*. In western Arnhem Land, religious feeling finds concrete expression in the varied shapes and designs of the *maraiin* objects, which include representations of birds and animals. Their form and workmanship are usually pleasing to the eye, but to the craftsman this is of secondary importance.[2]

Let us summarise the place of indigenous religion among the people of Arnhem Land.

In Aboriginal societies throughout Australia, this religious faith has been the mainstay of social life, giving meaning and background to behaviour patterns and institutions. Most people believed unquestioningly in the essential "rightness" of their way of life. Everything was explained, each member of the community had a definite place in the scheme of things, and the future was well determined.

Today, however, the Aborigines find that conditions are rapidly changing. The pressure of contact is greater now than it has been in the past. Beliefs that they have held for centuries are being questioned, and new ways and ideas are being enforced.

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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The old ceremonies, with their cycles of songs, are not performed so frequently, and the sacred objects are beginning to lose their significance. The religion and mythology which once held together all aspects of Aboriginal life are being weakened, and the traditional code no longer serves as a basis for the patterning of their lives. Instead the Aborigine is coming to rely more and more constantly on introduced criteria and beliefs, but because the change has been comparatively sudden he cannot adjust himself immediately to them, and so they fail to satisfy his needs.

We have referred more specially to the religion and associated beliefs of these Arnhem Landers, because no other aspect of their life expresses more fully the vividness and depth of their indigenous behaviour and thought. There are many other important elements in the Aboriginal cultures of Arnhem Land. Some will make their appearance in later Chapters, while the reader interested to learn more is referred to the anthropological works already mentioned. Our main purpose here has been to provide a cultural setting for our study of "outside" contact on the north coast of Arnhem Land. This, then, is the fundamental background of these Aboriginal societies which took the impact of contact, over a long period, with alien peoples.

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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However, they wanted the trade goods that these people could provide, and so they made an effort to adjust themselves to this new type of contact and to take up again the old traditional form of trading to which they were accustomed.

But they soon found that conditions had changed. These strangers brought with them Aborigines from other areas, and preferred to exploit the wealth of marine products themselves, using relatively few of the local people. This, of course, restricted the distribution of trade goods which they had expected to receive in payment for their work. Large scale trading was curtailed and was almost entirely replaced by individual bartering. This led to general resentment and dis-satisfaction.

They discovered, too, that although these Japanese and Europeans required native women for sexual purposes they were rarely willing to compensate their rightful guardians and husbands, preferring instead to decoy native women on to their boats or (as frequently happened) to take them by force. These same visitors paid no attention to native codes of morality and social intercourse,[24] and preferred to enjoy variety in sexual relations rather than to maintain one woman over a period. Any reasonably attractive woman was sexual bait to these men, some of whom admittedly tried to seduce as many of the younger ones as possible. Such an attitude has not been confined to this north-eastern coast. Many Europeans and Asiatics alike throughout the Northern Territory regarded all Aboriginal women as potential sexual partners, a state of affairs which exists to the present day. The behaviour of Japanese and European traders, trepangers and pearlers was modified in some areas because of the wariness and hostility of the Aboriginal men. At Groote Eylandt, for instance, native women were to some extent segregated from men even in their own camp life.[25] But in other regions, as in western Arnhem Land, it was accentuated.

Conditions of this kind resulted in various "massacres" and spearings, which continued until the Japanese were excluded and European trading was curtailed with the advent of the last war. But this period of what might be termed mutual antagonism had one good effect, which must not be underestimated. It forced many of these Aborigines to avail themselves of their natural

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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resources and develop their own internal economy, the clans to become more closely integrated and the group as a whole more self-sufficient. They were no longer dependent primarily on export and import, spending a great deal of their time around the Macassan settlements. Such outside goods as did find their way into the society were soon absorbed. It is probable, too, that their womenfolk had far less sexual contact with Europeans and Japanese than with the Indonesian traders. There were never as many of these newcomers on the coast at one time as there had been Malays and Macassans, and the Aborigines were never on such intimate terms with them as they had been with their predecessors.

However, the growing intensity of Mission contact, and the presence during the war years of large numbers of European troops, seem to have destroyed the natives' resistance to alien infiltration. Soon the reaction set in – actually the culminative effect of long centuries of contact with peoples who were culturally and psychologically different to themselves; and the result was gradually increasing dependence on Europeans. The desire for new ideas, and for all the material benefits they could achieve, was accentuated: but these were to be obtained only at the expense of their own culture and ideology. Although in the past they had learnt much about the successful absorption of alien belief and practice, these latter years found them wanting in knowledge concerning the practical application of their experience to modern problems. The deviation between Aboriginal and European cultures was greater than that between Aboriginal and Macassan, so that the present day finds these people largely unprepared for the changes that are upon them. Important aspects of their traditional life are disappearing. Religious fervour for the "old gods" is weakening; law and order are becoming more and more a matter of external control; and general disillusionment, with increased sexual laxity, accentuates these features that accompany a period of transition.

While the effects of long alien contact are only too apparent insofar as the native culture is concerned, the direct physical effects (excluding the effect of Asiatic and Indonesian strains on the Aboriginal stock) are few.[20] The fact that venereal disease are

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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to retain the best elements in their own culture, to set them on a firm economic footing, and above all to allow them to think and act for themselves. These aspirations are, as yet, only embryonic. Whether or not they will come to fruition rests primarily on the European agencies within the boundaries of Arnhem Land, and those immediately interested in its future.

During the war years, then, Mission activity was at a standstill. Church services were still held, but schools and training centres are only now being properly organised. Here, again a co-ordinated plan is needed where educational activities are concerned, and recently the Commonwealth Office of Education has been paying some attention to this.

When the Armed Forces withdrew from the greater part of Arnhem Land, the Aborigines were thrown on to the resources of the Missions, and they looked to these centres to fill the gap. Now, as we have seen, many of them are coming to settle more or less permanently around the Mission settlements, and they are demanding employment so that they may maintain the standard of living to which they have grown accustomed. But so far none of the Mission stations has been able to employ all of these potential labourers, and none has adequate means of training them for this work that they desire. In present circumstances these stations can only take a certain number of employees. Before others can be absorbed, new industries must be developed. This, together with education, is one of the most urgent problems facing Missions and administrations today. Employment must be relatively permanent and also remunerative, if it is to have desirable results. There are many incidental problems to be considered as well.

Although some aspects of native traditional life are still virile today, others are showing signs of collapse. Past alien contact has left its mark on the indigenous culture. This is more obvious in western Arnhem Land than in the east, although even there certain elements have almost disappeared. But a well balanced educational approach, including occupational training, should help to arrest social and cultural disintegration, strengthen traditional ties, and provide strength to meet future demands.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

779 Totems in sacred ceremonies are known as 'maraian', and generally denote some utensil used by the Ancestors. Maraian may also be birds, animals, or fish intimately linked with the Ancestors. Parts of the nomad's anatomy, representing that of an Ancestor, and usually their reproductive organs, feature in song and dance. Such caricatures are accepted by the nomads, but I have seen consternation and embarrassment amongst mixed parties of white visitors attending these ceremonies.

779 796 614 621 778 Totemic beliefs link widely separated hordes, who meet for ceremonies connected with the creation myth, for bone-burying and for initiations. Several clans may be co-guardians of the same sacred site, such as the Reratjingo of Port Bradshaw and the Lia-gullomirry from the Woolen River, who are separated by about a hundred and fifty miles, yet both belong to the Dua moiety and have close connexions with a sacred well on the Woolen River where a great mythical snake in Creation days distinguished himself by swallowing two of the Ancestresses. Guardianship of this site has been mainly in the hands of the Woolen River horde, but at rare intervals Reratjingo men from Port Bradshaw make their way to the well and take part in the ceremonies. A sacred maraian, consisting of a painted hollow log, represents the snake, and is the centre of the rite, and at certain stages in the proceedings the leader blows through it to produce dull, booming reverberations which are said to be the voice of the snake. An old man of the visiting Reratjingo returned to Port Bradshaw, painted a similar maraian, and introduced the ceremony to his horde; now his sons, grandsons, and nephews carry out the ritual of this totem.

[178]

778 531 Some designs and myths, painted on maraian in coloured clays, or bound with string and parrot feathers, involve weeks of careful preparation. A shower of rain will efface the paint, moths may consume the string; the horde leader